

## Custodial Parents Living in Poverty

*The Story Behind the Numbers Fact Sheet Series takes a closer look at child support program data. This series presents the results of data analyses to better understand program performance and caseload trends. Through deeper understanding of the story behind the numbers, the series aims to inform policy and practice and strengthen program outcomes.*

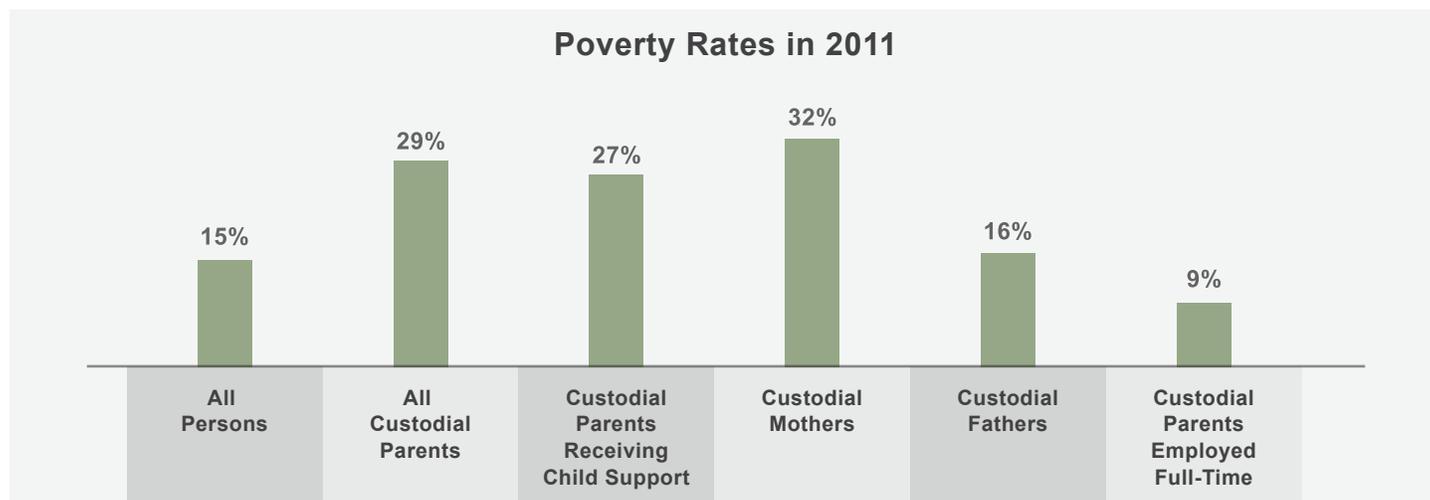
*This fact sheet focuses on data reported in a recent U.S. Census Bureau report entitled, Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2011.<sup>1</sup>*



### Proportion of custodial parents living below poverty line continues to increase in 2011.

According to the census report, there was an increase in the number and proportion of custodial parents who lived below the poverty line in 2011. The report found that 4.2 million custodial parents lived in poverty in 2011, representing 29 percent of all custodial parents, about twice the poverty rate for the total population. This is an increase from 2009 when the number of custodial parents who lived in poverty was 3.9 million, representing 28 percent of all custodial parents.

The census report shows that the poverty rate is lower among custodial parents who receive child support. In 2011, 27 percent of custodial parents who received child support were poor. Poverty rates also vary by other characteristics of custodial parents, such as their age and gender. For example, 32 percent of custodial mothers lived in poverty as compared to 16 percent of custodial fathers. Some of the highest poverty rates occurred among custodial mothers who lack a high school diploma (60 percent), have three or more children (57 percent), or who are under 30 years of age (46 percent). Custodial parents who worked full time year-round (9 percent) or who have a bachelor's degree or higher (8 percent) had some of the lowest poverty rates.



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### What do we know about poor custodial parents?

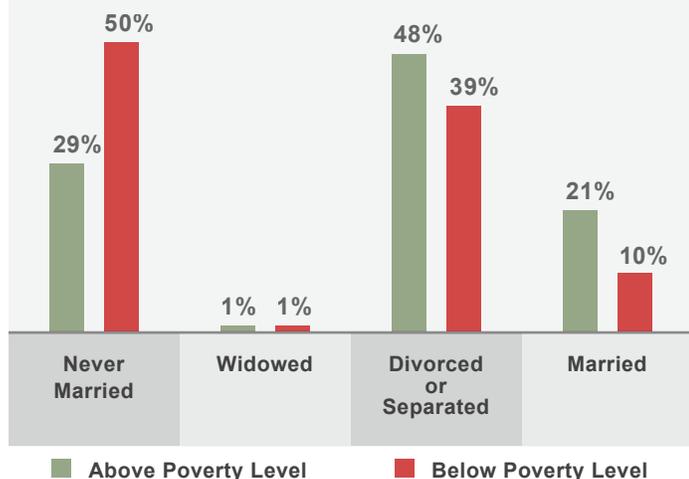
Custodial parents who live in poverty are much more likely to be female, never married, under 30 years old, and have fewer years of education than custodial parents who do not live in poverty. We also know that poor custodial parents are much more likely to receive child support services than non-poor custodial parents.<sup>2</sup> Ninety percent of poor custodial parents are female, while 78 percent of non-poor custodial parents are female. Among poor custodial parents, fifty percent are never married versus 29 percent of non-poor custodial parents. Custodial parents with incomes above the poverty level are much more likely to be divorced or separated (48 percent). Approximately one-third of poor custodial parents are under 30 years of age, while 17 percent of non-poor custodial parents are under 30 years. Over half (56 percent) of non-poor custodial parents are White (non-Hispanic), while over half (61 percent) of poor custodial parents are Black (non-Hispanic) or Hispanic. Almost a third (30 percent) of poor custodial parents have less than a high school education, but only 9 percent of non-poor custodial parents have this amount of education. More than half (57 percent) of poor custodial parents have two or more children eligible for child support, while over half (62 percent) of non-poor custodial parents have just one child eligible for child support. Poor custodial parents are less likely to work than non-poor custodial parents (51 percent versus 88 percent), and poor custodial parents are more likely to participate in other public assistance or welfare programs (76 percent versus 24 percent).

### Child Support is an important source of income for families.

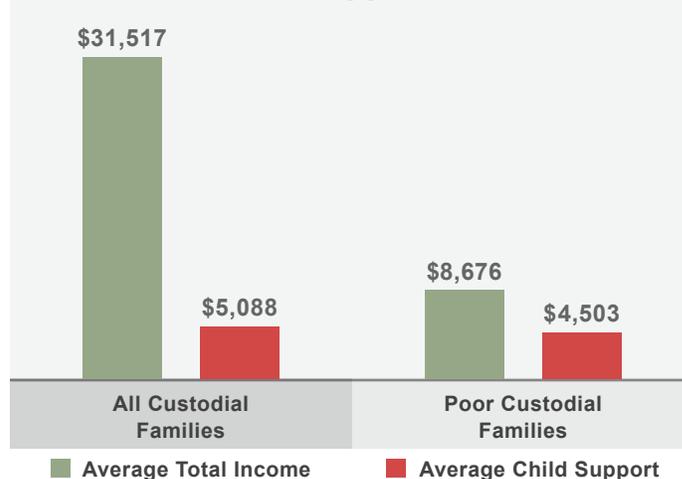
Child support is an important source of income for custodial families, especially for those who live below the poverty line. For all custodial parents who received child support in 2011, the average amount received was \$5,088 and their average yearly income was \$31,517. For custodial parents with incomes below poverty, the average amount of child support received was \$4,503 and their average total yearly income was \$8,676. Thus, average child support represented 52 percent of the average income for custodial parents below poverty who received child support, compared with 16 percent for all custodial parents. The average amount of child support received by poor custodial parents increased between 2009 and 2011, from \$3,909 to \$4,503, while the average amount of poor custodial parent income increased from \$8,642 to \$8,676. Thus, average child support as a percent of average custodial parent income increased during this period, from 45 percent to 52 percent.

These statistics reinforce the essential role that child support services can play in helping low-income families, especially during an economic downturn. Parents in the child support program tend to have lower incomes than those who do not receive child support services and are particularly vulnerable to economic downturns. Because of their relatively low incomes, when families in the child support program receive child support, it represents a larger percent of their family income than it does for custodial families outside of the program.

**Marital Status of Custodial Parents by Poverty Status, 2011**



**Total Custodial Parent Income and Amount of Child Support Received 2011**

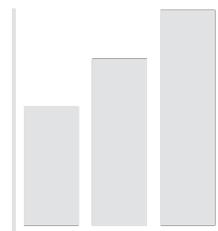


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### Source and Limitations of Data

The data reported are estimated based on a biennial survey of custodial parents, the Child Support Supplement to the Current Population Survey.<sup>3</sup>

This supplement is co-sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement. While we have very detailed information on the IV-D caseload, there is no national source of information for total (IV-D and non-IV-D) child support recipients and total amount of child support received. We rely on nationally representative surveys such as this one to provide information on the total child support population. It is important to note that this survey includes both IV-D and non-IV-D families, but does not include households where children are living with someone other than their biological parent (e.g., aunt, uncle, grandparents).



### For More Information

Address questions and comments about this child support fact sheet to Dennis Putze at [dennis.putze@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:dennis.putze@acf.hhs.gov).

## References

1. U.S. Census Bureau, Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2011, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p60-246.pdf>.
2. Kye Lippold and Elaine Sorensen. Characteristics of Families Served by the Child Support (IV-D) Program: 2010 Census Survey Results. The Urban Institute. July 2013.
3. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey-Child Support Supplement, March/April 2010 and March/April 2012. For technical documentation, see: <http://www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmarapr10.pdf> and <http://www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsapr12.pdf>.

